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Elements of a Trauma-Informed School

Kimberly Avitt

Northwestern College

A Literature Review Presented

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Dr. Angila Moffitt

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Abstract

This literature review explores the research of what makes a trauma-informed school and what interventions are effective in implementing trauma-informed teaching practices to help students with past traumatic experiences become more success in school. Research documents a large number of students who have experienced trauma and that this trauma has a significant impact on a child's development, both cognitive and social. Teachers and schools are at the forefront of this problem and ideally suited to address this problem. This literature review reveals key areas of focus when implementing trauma-informed teaching practices, which include relationships, resiliency, and climate and culture.

Keywords: trauma, relationships, resiliency, climate and culture

Elements of a Trauma-Informed School

Educators and students in schools today face many challenges. Most students in PK-12 schools across the United States have experienced at least one traumatic experience in their lives. Studies indicate that more than 65% of children in the United States experience at least one traumatic event before adulthood (Meyer, 2015). Trauma has a significant impact on a child's development and brain structure, including cognitive development, learning, emotional regulation, and social development (Meyer, 2015). Furthermore, these impacts have an effect far into adulthood, causing health issues for sufferers of childhood trauma (Grasso, Dierkhising, Branson, Ford & Lee, 2015).

Schools play a major role in improving educational outcomes and impacting the well-being of traumatized students; making schools an ideal spot to receive mental health services (Crosby, 2015). The problem is that schools need to become more trauma-informed so they are equipped to help students overcome the adversity and mental health issues that arise. Schools are not equipped to handle the mental health challenges and feelings of students dealing with trauma (Walkey & Cox, 2013). Furthermore, schools struggle to balance academics with mental health challenges. Schools struggle with how to prioritize education while addressing student needs in dealing with trauma (Alisic, 2012).

For students to be successful in school, school staff need to be equipped with strategies in how to identify trauma in children and respond in effective ways. Schools need to become more trauma-informed and aware of students' socio-emotional needs, and ensure their educational needs are met (Crosby, 2015). Students are unable to learn new information and skills when they are in fear due to the trauma they are experiencing. Trauma affects the brain by limiting the brain's ability to receive and use new information (Pawlo, Lorenzo, Eichert, & Elias, 2019).

Implementing trauma-informed teaching practices does help students with traumatic backgrounds learn to control their emotions and be more successful in school by mastering academic standards, accomplishing academic goals, and graduating from school. To implement trauma-informed practices, teachers need additional training. Through professional development, teachers learn how to recognize trauma and recognize the best practices to meet the needs of students with histories of trauma. By helping students build resiliency through relationship building, community connections, structured routines, and a climate and culture of safety in school buildings, students begin to overcome trauma.

The purpose of this literature review is to determine the qualities of a trauma-informed school and what interventions are effective in implementing trauma-informed teaching practices to help students with trauma histories experience more success. Research was conducted by locating articles from scholarly journals and other sources with an emphasis on trauma-informed teaching practices. The research focused on elementary-aged students. Sources of information were current within the last ten years and were from peer-reviewed sources. This literature review will explore the background, history, and importance of trauma-informed teaching practices. The themes emerging from research conducted in trauma-informed teaching include the importance of relationships between teachers and the students as well as the school and community, the importance of building resiliency and empowerment in students, and climate and culture of a school building.

Review of the Literature

The Background of Trauma

Crosby (2015) defines trauma as, “Experiences that cause intense physical and/or psychological stress reactions which can either occur from a single event or multiple events that has a lasting adverse effect on an individual’s physical social, emotional, or spiritual well-being,” (Crosby, 2015, p.223). Traumatic experiences can include violence, abuse, severe accidents, illness, losses, maltreatment, and physical assaults. When trauma or traumatic experiences occur in children, the trauma is known as adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Surveys conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) show that 61% of adults have experienced at least one ACE in their lives, and one in six reported four or more ACEs in their childhood (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). The more ACEs a child experiences, the more likely they are to have negative outcomes. These negative outcomes can include both behavior and academic challenges including language delays, aggression, attendance issues, depression, anxiety, partaking in high-risk behaviors, and delayed cognitive development (Cavanaugh, 2016).

Cole, Eisner, Gregory, & Ristuccia (2019) found that in a trauma-informed school, all students feel safe, welcome, and supported. Trauma-informed schools make their educational mission to address trauma’s impact on learning, and when schools become more trauma-informed, students are set up for success. Schools have the responsibility to understand trauma’s impact on learning, support students to feel safe, be able to adapt, and have a strong sense of school community.

Trauma is often mislabeled in students as trauma has very similar symptoms to multiple other disorders. Meyer (2015) found that students who have been exposed to trauma often

become mislabeled with other disorders, such as attention deficit disorder, oppositional defiant disorder, and conduct disorder. This misdiagnosis keeps students from getting the correct intervention to heal. Blitz, Anderson, and Saastamoinen (2016) note that trauma-informed schools realize many children have experienced trauma and understand the impact of this trauma on students. Trauma-informed schools then use this knowledge to put into practice the school-wide supports needed to promote both healing and growth as opposed to punishment.

Thomas, Crosby, and Vanderhaar (2019) point out the importance of trauma-informed teaching practices in schools today. The number of students who are facing adversity continues to increase, and the need to provide school environments for these students where they can feel safe, cared for, and empowered continues to grow. Schools need to recognize this trend and adapt to this challenge, as this problem will not come and go. Walkley and Cox (2013) found early childhood prevention and interventions are crucial as these positive early experiences build a strong foundation for life-long resiliency. This increase in knowledge and understanding of trauma will be of great benefit to students.

Educators in schools today agree that schools should be involved in the mental health support of students. Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri and Goel (2011) found 89% of teachers surveyed felt schools should be involved with the mental health needs of students, but only 41% of the teachers felt they have the skills to work with these students. Educators have a strong desire to help students overcome and be successful, but educators also need guidance in how and where to start.

In December of 2015, Every Child Succeeds Act was signed into law allowing funding for evidence-based trauma-informed practices to be implemented into schools as a way of helping schools deal with the increasing need for classroom behavior management training

(Purtle & Lewis, 2017, p. 870). With this funding, teachers began to learn strategies to help assist students in overcoming trauma. In addition to strategies, teachers received needed training in identifying the students who had experienced trauma and the signs of mental health struggles.

Themes

Relationships Between Educators and Students

Research has shown that positive relationships between educators and students are key to assisting students with traumatic backgrounds in overcoming their adversity and helping students to be successful in school. Creating relationships between educators and students that are safe, stable, and nurturing creates many positive outcomes in academics and life. These positive school relationships help children reach full health and life potential, as well as prevent Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) from occurring (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2020). For students to grow into successful adults, it is important for students to not be exposed to ACEs. If students are to reach their full life potential, they need multiple positive relationships in their lives.

Sciaraffa, Zeanah, and Zeanah (2017) have theorized that relationships provide extra needed support to students when they are experiencing moments of stress during the school day. Students who have had traumatic experiences in their lives are often lacking a caring relationship and do not have the skills to develop positive relationships in their lives, making it imperative to build a caring relationship outside of their home. Meyer (2015) and Crosby (2015) add that since students spend a great deal of time at school, and school has a significant impact on students; educators are more likely to become a support system for students. Educators create a positive and caring relationship to provide extra support for the students they serve when these

students are experiencing stress during the school day. Dods (2013) adds that it is important to form positive caring relationships as early in life as possible, finding that students who do not have caring and trusted adults in their lives will often not form relationships to avoid being hurt as other adults treated them.

Atallah, Koslouski, Perkins, Marsico, & Porche (2019) found that when educator and student relationships are established, specifically when healthy relationships are created, students will have a sense of belonging within the school setting. When students are more connected with their surroundings, they will feel much more comfortable going to school and feel less isolated. For students to be more successful in school and life, it is vital for them to attend school as much as possible. Dods (2013) agrees with the importance of relationships and expands the idea to state that the relationship between teacher and student plays a critical role in the support of learning as well as the well-being of students. When these relationships between educators and students are built, educators are able to recognize student strengths, create more meaningful lessons, and encourage students to build upon their strengths to develop them to the fullest potential.

Research has shown that positive relationships formed between teachers and students will further decrease risky behaviors in students (Dods, 2013). Students begin to feel isolated, have feelings of mistrust about the environment and the adults in a school, and can feel as if everything is a threat to their safety, often resulting in students showing inappropriate behavior. Terrasi and Galarce (2017) continue this thinking about relationships and misbehaviors, in saying that teachers need to receive trauma-informed training as to not punish what may be seen as misbehavior, thus further pushing a student into self-isolation. Other researchers agree that relationships and behaviors are intertwined, when relationships are lacking, there is an increase

in inappropriate behavior. Alisic (2012) found that teachers are able to identify any behavior changes occurring with a student, as well as understand any blocks the student might have when overcoming their struggles and recovering. With this knowledge of trauma-informed practices, and with the amount of time teachers spend with students, teachers are able to identify those students in distress and implement social emotional skills to help the students through behavior challenges and improve school performance. Teachers have an obligation to listen to students more actively, while working with the students to create and build social-emotional skills.

Equally important in building relationships is an increase in the amount of positive interactions occurring between educators and students. Cavanaugh (2016) finds a need to have higher instances of positive interaction with students who have experienced trauma. These positive encounters result in improved academics, more engagement, and fewer behavioral interruptions. These educator and student relationships should not be based on power and who is in control, but a more shared approach where the power and decision-making are shared between the teacher and student (Bulanda & Johnson, 2015). This approach of sharing power and decision-making allows for students to feel more trust in the relationship, helping the students to not feel isolated. Students then begin to become more connected and begin to feel more empowered, leading the students to overcome past traumatic experiences and take control of their lives.

Researchers point out the need for teachers to be active listeners with students and care about students not just as learners in their classroom, but as people as well (Dods, 2013). Relationships have shown to be very powerful tools in helping students who have experienced trauma. Studies have shown positive relationships can positively impact brain development and improve later health and development (Sciaraffa, Zeanah, and Zeanah, 2017). Sciaraffa,

Zeanah, and Zeanah, (2017) support the idea of relationships being very powerful and encourage interventions as early as possible to counteract trauma.

Relationships Between Schools and Community

Meyer (2015) advocates for strong collaboration between all adults in a child's life. In order for children suffering from trauma to overcome the challenges of trauma, collaboration between all people involved in the life of a child is necessary. It is critical for students to feel a connection to their community. Schools and community partners need to work on encouraging students to participate and build relationships within their schools, families, and neighborhoods. Research has found that positive relationships between schools, families, and students improve the quality of students' lives and give students a sense of control over choices in their lives (Bulanda & Johnson, 2015). When all partners collaborate, students are more successful in school and in life whereas, families and communities are strengthened. Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen (2016) conducted a mixed methods research study with staff at the elementary level. Interviews were used to determine perceptions of student behavior, cultural awareness, trauma and toxic stress. Interviews were conducted following professional development presentations on trauma and toxic stress related to culture. The study concluded that schools need to become more aware of relationships outside of the school building and work to build relationships with families because relationships improve school culture and lessen the risk of secondary trauma.

According to Baez, Renshaw, Bachman, Kim, Smith, and Stafford (2019), community-based programs offer great benefits to any community by lowering neighborhood crime rates,

increasing graduation rates, lowering drop-out rates, and helping students to feel more connected. With more community partnerships, families can access academic, mental health, medical, and social service supports more easily and quickly. Metzler, Merrick, Klevens, Ports, & Ford (2016) recommend that schools consider working with community partners to create a central location for parents to visit and to learn about services. These locations could direct parents to health care, mental health care, housing needs, food and any other additional services based on the community. By families receiving these services, the stress levels for families are reduced, potentially preventing trauma. This creation of trauma-informed networks, where partners are collaborating to provide the best care for students, ultimately strengthens and improves the relationship with families.

Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen (2016) state that family engagement is an important factor in schools that are high achieving, and go on to suggest that in general, schools have negative perceptions of students' families that result in educators have less meaningful contact with parents. In order for the relationship between schools and families to benefit students, families with trauma require additional support. Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen (2016) state the need for schools to learn more about trauma to understand families through a more trauma-informed lens. Metzler et al. (2016) continues to emphasize the importance of strengthening this school and family relationship by improving parenting programs. Many communities have parent education programs, which focus on addressing skills to improving parenting. These programs need to shift to programs that work to build safe, stable, nurturing relationships between parents and children as well as early prevention to be proactive in stopping trauma side effects (Metzler et al., 2016).

Resiliency and Empowerment

Resiliency helps students to recognize their emotions, adapt to change, and cope with stress, allowing students to overcome struggles related to trauma. Resilience interventions then reduce the risk of poor academic outcomes and mental health struggles that are related to trauma (Ijadi-Maghsoodi, et. al., 2017). Resilience interventions lead to students being more prepared for adulthood and allow students to be more successful with school, careers, and relationships. Powers and Duys (2020) define resiliency as, “the ability to return to a functional or transformed state after experiencing an adversity; in other words, resiliency is the ability to successfully adapt to stress, trauma, or chronic adversity,” (Powers and Duys, 2020, para 10). Building resiliency in children who have traumatic backgrounds helps them to overcome the trauma they have experienced. When schools make shifts in consistency, safety, and collaboration, these elements become embedded into the culture of a school, supporting student resiliency (Anderson, Blitz, & Saastamoinen, 2015).

Research has shown that children are resilient, their brains are flexible, and that the brain has the ability to rewire itself to form new connections, thus allowing trauma symptoms to be reduced if the right interventions are put in place (Terrasi and de Galarce, 2017). Some children will experience a traumatic event and never have lasting, negative side effects from it, while other children will experience a traumatic event and have negative effects from it. Resiliency is a process; it is a battle between promotive factors and risk factors, with the end goal being a positive outcome or less negative outcome (Ijadi-Maghsoodi, Marlotte, Garcia, Aralis, and Lester, 2017).

When evaluating trauma-informed approaches in building resiliency, research has shown the risks of re-traumatization of students. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services

Administration (2014) stresses the need for educators to recognize educational practices that can trigger memories and result in the re-traumatization of a student. Avoiding re-traumatization implies the need to give content warnings to students, alerting them to sensitive topics being taught, thus keeping students from being re-traumatized. There are other researchers who disagree with the need to focus on re-traumatization stating this focus hinders a strong educational program. Levinovitz (2016) finds that trigger warnings hinder free speech and open discussion in the classroom by stifling any discussion including controversial subjects. These class discussions are happening in classrooms, which should be safe spaces, as it is unlikely trauma and violence will occur in the classroom after the discussion. These classroom discussions can help students begin to heal from the trauma they have experienced (Lukianoff and Haidt, 2015). Lainson (2019) argues that content warnings limit rigor and engagement in learning, and result in some students not receiving an equal educational experience.

Schools are using evidence-based strategies to build resiliency in students who have experienced trauma. Previously, the focus of programs and strategies for students who experienced trauma was more of a reactive approach; programs and strategies have shifted to instruction focusing on preventative and self-regulation strategies that focus on how to react to students in punitive ways. Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, and Santos (2016) found that there is a shift from more of the traditional programs that focused on reactive strategies to more of a prevention approach, which focuses on self-regulation and coping skills. When students learn to self-regulate, they learn to identify feelings and to express those feelings in healthy ways. Teachers can help students with self-regulation by recognizing when students are in distress and by responding quickly, as well as by modeling proper self-regulation of emotions and talking to students about the emotions they are feeling (Sciaraffa, Zeanah, & Zeanah, 2017).

Racco and Vis (2014) found that there is not a one size fits all program to treat trauma; but that there are always adaptations that need to be made to the programs. Programs need to be flexible to be able to adapt based on needs, as well as the need for early intervention.

Chafouleas, Johnson, Overstreet, and Santos (2015) agree that early intervention is strongly related to a child's overall success in school.

Research points out the importance of empowerment in building resiliency in children who have experienced trauma. Empowerment is defined as, "individuals or groups gaining control and mastery of social, economic, and political contexts in their lives in order to improve equity and quality of life" (Bulanda & Johnson, 2015, p. 304). Empowerment helps children overcome the trauma they have experienced, increases physical and mental health, and builds resiliency. Social emotional learning programs help identify strengths of students and then build on strengths to empower students to take on new roles and challenges, increasing students' self-esteem and giving students with trauma backgrounds a sense of control in their lives.

Blitz, Anderson, & Saatamoinen (2016) have found that there is a need for more classroom-based strategies to be incorporated into daily routines to effectively work with students who are struggling emotionally or behaviorally. Researchers have begun to look at social emotional learning programs to decrease disruptive behaviors and emotional distress while increasing academic performance (Ijadi-Maghsoodi, et. al., 2017). Social emotional learning programs, which can be incorporated into daily school routines, help students learn the skills needed to overcome trauma. Aber, Brown, Jones, Berg, and Torrente (2011) found that students who had participated in social emotional learning programs had lower levels of depression, fewer feelings of aggression, and higher levels of academics, attendance, and achievement.

In addition to social emotional programs, use of mindfulness techniques have been found to assist students in beginning to cope with trauma, reduce stress, and build resiliency by helping with focusing and self-regulation (Sciaraffa, Zennah, & Zennah, 2017). Mindfulness activities include yoga, breathing exercises, stretching, and visualizations. Mindfulness has been found to be useful in overcoming trauma and has shown to change reactions in a positive way and promote self-acceptance in students (Moreno, 2017).

More recent research builds on the need for trauma and social emotional learning programs, showing the strong connection needed between trauma-informed approaches and multi-tiered service delivery, such as Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) frameworks. MTSS is a framework that uses data-based problem solving and decision-making interventions for struggling students, which provides the students with accurate, scalable and durable skill implementation (Chafouleas et al., 2015). Social emotional learning programs stress a more prevention-oriented approach, where problems are identified early and progress is monitored throughout. Baez et al. (2019) found the need for a multi-tiered approach to trauma, where targeting the students with more complex trauma was key to successful trauma-informed schools. The MTSS approach to behavior focuses on data driven decisions and not decisions made based on other feelings and emotions. The MTSS approach helps guide the changes schools need to make in a more timely and effective manner, as well as increase the level of intensity in interventions based on the needs found in the monitoring. Chafouleas et al. (2015) describe the tiers for multi-tiered services in trauma-informed practices with tier one being core instruction and the following two tiers developing more intense interventions based on increasing needs. By implementation of the tier intervention framework, it ensures that students receive the support they need to overcome the trauma in their lives.

Climate and Culture

Myers (2015) provides guidance into what is needed for schools to create a trauma-informed school system and conducted an action research project. Myers (2015) learned that becoming a trauma-informed school begins with schools creating a community that is safe and connected, as well as one that allows for all students to have access to the supports they need. Cole et al. (2019) agrees with the need for all students to feel safe, secure, and encouraged, and for students to be welcomed into the classroom environment. Researchers found that successful trauma-informed schools evaluate and monitor the current state of climate and culture.

Successful schools have developed a culture of collaboration and caring to ensure all students in the building feel included (Anderson, Blitz, Saatamoinen, 2015). For schools to support every student within their building, there is a need for a collaborative approach, where all staff and students take ownership in the climate and culture of a building. Baez et al. (2019) found that schools need to collaborate with multiple partners within the school and community to support students. A collaborative approach to improved climate and culture resulted in positive academic and behavioral outcomes, students felt more connected to school, improved school attendance occurred, and students reported feelings of greater self-worth.

Cole et al. (2019) found collaboration among all staff and leadership to be an essential component in developing a trauma-informed school. Atallah et al. (2019) agrees with the importance of collaboration in school and found that collaboration can lead to healthy relationships between teachers and students. The relationship between teacher and student helps students build a sense of belonging in the school, leading to improved climate and culture within the school building. With the sense of teamwork, all staff will begin to take responsibility for students.

Along with this collaboration, Anderson, Blitz, and Saastamoinen (2015) have found the need for all staff to create a consistent learning environment within a school. Similarly, Pawlo et al. (2019) learned that in positive school climates, predictable routines help children who have experienced trauma by providing a sense of safety that may be missing in their lives and also reducing fear. Pawlo et al. (2019) suggest that schools modify schedules to be providing more consistency in student daily routines. Terrasi and Galarce (2017) found that equally important to consistency in daily routines is the consistency in behavioral expectations. This involves setting clear boundaries and using a common vocabulary. Consistency of the daily routines improves the climate of the building and allowing students to feel safer and more connected.

Shifts in thinking can change the mindsets of educators. When educators shift their thinking and gain a deeper understanding of trauma and the impact of trauma on learning, trauma awareness skills become embedded in the classroom. Trauma awareness leads to positive changes in the culture of the school and ultimately, changes the way a school is run (Atallah et.al, 2019). Teachers need to look more closely at disruptive behaviors and approach them with more empathy, listening and thinking first before reacting. Cole et al. (2019) suggest using behaviors as learning opportunities. The challenge to schools is to move from managing behavior and punishments to educating students in self-regulation skills. Shifts in thinking lead to positive changes in the culture of a school as well as positive changes in behavior, empowered educators, and improved educational outcomes for students.

Researched-based programs are available to assist schools and teachers in developing trauma-informed teaching practices and improve climate and culture. Fecser (2014) looks closely at one such program, Life Space Crisis Intervention. Life Space Crisis Intervention (LSCI) is an established framework approach for trauma-informed teaching. This program has

been used regularly with success in parts of Europe and Australia, but it has not yet been researched with students in the United States. Through interactive therapy and strategies for turning crisis into learning opportunities, developers have found success with reducing students' behavioral challenges and conflicts with staff (Fecser, 2014). Educators need to look at students with behavioral challenges and see these as learning opportunities as well as areas for growth and change. Fecser (2014) outlines the stages of LSCI, pointing out the requirement of strong relationships between the student and the teachers. The stages work to de-escalate students as well as guide students in new social behaviors through learning and practice. When LSCI is implemented with fidelity, the program has shown to decrease anxiety while at the same time increasing academic performance (Fecser, 2014).

To improve culture, students need to develop a positive purpose, which will be improving academics outcomes, social and emotional skills, critical thinking skills, and citizenship (Cole et al., 2019). To improve outcomes for students, teachers can help students find and emphasize their strengths, instead of looking for the deficits. Along with the focus on strengths, schools need to consider additional needs of students. To improve the climate and culture of a school building, students from traumatic backgrounds often need a spot in the school building to slow down for a moment (Pelayo, 2020). Schools need to have a location available to students to take breaks. This quiet spot, such as a library, should be used by students to calm themselves and take a break when it is needed during stressful times of the day. This location should always be available to students throughout the day.

When working to create a positive school climate, a whole child approach has shown to be effective. Data has shown that students' social emotional needs and academic successes are connected (Atallah et al., 2019). Along with the whole child approach, there is an importance

placed on faculty and staff to listen and think first before they respond to students. Crosby (2015) found a successful framework for teachers to use as a guide to stay trauma-informed when responding to students. This framework includes remaining calm, attuned and present, predictable, and to not let your emotions become escalated based on student emotions.

Using a whole child approach, whereas the focus is on student strengths as opposed to deficits, creates a positive climate and culture. The whole child approach focuses on developing a positive sense of purpose in students. Researchers found developing a positive sense of purpose improves the self-concept of students who have been affected by trauma (Pawlo et al., 2019). Crosby (2015) found students have a need to feel like they have ownership and control in the classroom, which can be accomplished by allowing students to make choices in their education and can include exploring interests in other areas.

Schools and educators need to be prepared for the strong emotional intensity students who have experienced trauma bring into the classroom (Pawlo et al., 2019). To not let climate of a school be overwhelmed with these needs, it is important to teach and learn de-escalation strategies (Chafouleas et al., 2016). Many de-escalation strategies can be covered in social-emotional learning programs. Racco and Vis (2014) found through research that there are many benefits to yoga and art therapy. Yoga allows for body regulation as well as mind-body connections, all of which have a positive impact on well-being. Art therapy allows for expression of emotions, building a sense of control in students. Both yoga and art therapy programs help to build a positive climate and culture in a building.

Working with students with traumatic backgrounds is a stressful undertaking for teachers and leaves teachers in a state of chronic stress (Pawlo, Lorenzo, Eichert, & Elias, 2019). Teacher stress is caused by behavioral challenges displayed by students, the need to build supportive

relationships between teachers and students, and working with students on understanding and managing their emotions. The emotional stability of teachers in a school is vitally important. Being in a state of chronic stress can make it difficult for teachers to continue to respond to children with patience and caring. To create a more positive school climate, a school needs to address and respond to the emotional needs and well-being of teachers. When teachers' needs are met, this care continues down to students and affects the students' feelings of being safe and cared for (Pawlo et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Schools across the United States are diverse, including students who have experienced trauma in their lives. Trauma has an impact on children academically, behaviorally, and developmentally as well as having lasting health effects into adulthood. Schools need to become more trauma-informed to help these students overcome this adversity. Recently, many reforms have been implemented in schools to increase the rigor of academics; it is now time to also focus on the social-emotional needs of students to help them become the kind of people they have the ability to become (Terrasi and Gakarce, 2017). Schools need to become more trauma-informed and teaching practices need to change to help students conquer the impacts of trauma. There is a greater need for more awareness in trauma-informed practices (Meyer, 2015). There are common themes that researchers have found schools can implement to become more trauma-informed.

This literature review discovered that schools should focus on a few key ideas to become trauma-informed. The first of these is to build quality relationships within the school setting and expand these to the community to create meaningful partnerships. In addition to relationships, schools need to build resiliency and empowerment in the students they serve. Adding social emotional learning programs can help improve resiliency in students. Finally, schools can work on improving the climate and culture of the building.

Research continues to be ongoing. There is a need for more research in the most effective social emotional learning programs. Additional research on how effective these programs are with subgroups such as English language learners, special education students, gender, students' age, and minorities would help schools to focus on their needs more. Racco and Vis (2014) found that there is a certain program or strategy that is successful for all ages of

children. There are failures and needs for modifications. Further research is needed in alternative treatments, such as art therapy or yoga, for children exposed to trauma to determine if these types of programs are successful in helping students overcome trauma. Along with this further research, there is a strong need for more teacher training in trauma. For schools to be successful in implementing trauma-informed practices in their schools and classrooms, professional development and trainings are needed, as teachers are critical to the success of trauma-informed programs.

Helping traumatized students develop and become successful in school is a challenge in an education system with pressure to achieve high levels of academics. By implementing trauma-informed strategies, schools ensure that students develop into adults who can build a better future for themselves (Crosby, 2015, p. 229). When trauma is no longer a hindrance for students, students can focus their attention and energies on building their academic skills, resulting in school success.

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